

ARTICLE 17
ON PAGE 423

NEW YORK TIMES
13 March, 1985

Why The U.S. Must End Its War

By Daniel Ortega Saavedra

President Reagan asks the American people and Congress to continue financing the Central Intelligence Agency's covert war against Nicaragua. He says his aim is to make Nicaragua cry "uncle," to bring about a "restructuring" of our Government. Here are four reasons why the American people and their representatives should say no, and should demand an end to efforts to overthrow Nicaragua's popularly elected Government.

1. The covert war is illegal. The World Court, on May 10, 1984, ordered the United States immediately to stop its aggression. It cited the charters of the United Nations and Organization of American States, which prohibit the use of force against the territorial integrity and political independence of another nation. Instead of complying, the Administration walked out of the court.

The war cannot be justified as "self-defense." The Administration now admits that its purpose is to overthrow our Government — not, as Congress and the American people were told, to interdict an alleged flow of arms to Salvadoran rebels. Even while it maintained this pretense, the Administration never produced real evidence of an arms flow — because it does not exist. The Administration knows this; if it had evidence of arms trafficking, it would have been eager to prove its case in the World Court.

Why care about international law? Because disrespect for law breeds

Daniel Ortega Saavedra is President of Nicaragua.

chaos. When a powerful nation repudiates international law — and its highest symbol, the World Court — it threatens the entire legal order and sets a dangerous precedent.

2. The covert war is immoral. This war is directed against Nicaraguan civilians, not our military. The "contras" penetrate our territory from bases in Honduras and Costa Rica to murder, torture, mutilate, kidnap and abuse defenseless women, men and children. They burn down and blow up farms, health centers, food depots and schools. Thousands of civilians have perished and the damage to our economy is in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

Mr. Reagan calls these terrorists "freedom fighters." His Administration tries to cover up their atrocities, dismissing these as "Sandinista

propaganda." But reports of contra atrocities by American human rights organizations, published last week, reveal the full, horrible truth to the American people, who are literally financing these crimes.

The contras are led by ex-officers of the hated National Guard, the main prop of the Somoza dictatorship that brutally oppressed our people for more than four decades until our Sandinista revolution threw them out on July 19, 1979.

It is immoral, and contrary to American values, for the Administration to attempt to impose a new government on Nicaragua. Our Government was elected Nov. 4, 1984, in the freest, fairest elections in Nicaragua's history. More than 1.1 million people voted (75.4 percent of those registered) and seven political parties participated. The opposition parties received more than 33 percent of the vote and now hold 35 of 96 seats in our legislature. Mr. Reagan predictably called the election a "sham," but hundreds of international observers — including private American academic and human rights groups — closely watched the entire electoral campaign and concluded that it was free and fair.

3. The covert war is futile and unnecessary. In more than four years of fighting, and despite more than \$100 million in American aid, the contras have failed to capture or hold any Nicaraguan territory. There is only one explanation: they have no popular support. As an artificially maintained force, they would cease to exist the moment Washington ended its support.

There is no reason for Washington to continue this support. Nicaragua represents no threat to any of its legitimate security interests in Central America. In the Contadora process and at talks at Manzanillo, Mexico,

we have made it clear that we are willing to address American concerns. We have stated repeatedly that we want no foreign military bases on our soil, that we would agree with our neighbors to a reasonable balance of armed forces and armaments in Central America and to the removal of all foreign military advisers. We will never be an aggressor nation. Our arms are strictly defensive.

One pretext for the covert war is the supposed need to force Nicaragua to the negotiating table. However, as Representative Michael Barnes has said, accurately, Nicaragua already is there. Nicaragua is fully committed to a political solution. Nicaragua alone accepted the September 1984 peace proposal of the Contadora countries — Colombia, Mexico, Panama and Venezuela. The United States sabotaged the agreement by pressing its Central American allies not to accept. And it was the United States, not Nicaragua, that broke off the Manzanillo talks.

The problem is not forcing Nicaragua to negotiate; it is persuading the Administration to negotiate with Nicaragua, and to give more than lip service to the Contadora process.

4. The covert war is counter-productive. If President Reagan really wants us to reduce the size of our army, stop acquiring arms and send home foreign military advisers, he should end his covert war and his unprecedented military buildup in Honduras. If there were no war against us, we would enthusiastically divert manpower and resources, now consumed by defense requirements, to economic and social development.

The Administration complains that we obtain arms from socialist countries, but the Administration makes this necessary. Are we not entitled to obtain arms to defend ourselves? Washington has pressed its allies not to sell arms to us. Where else are we supposed to obtain them?

President Reagan calls us "totalitarian" because we imposed a state of emergency that restricts certain rights, including press freedom with regard to military and security matters. The state of emergency was imposed in 1982 in direct response to the covert war. If Mr. Reagan really wants the full restoration of political and civil rights, he need only stop the war. My Government is committed to lifting the state of emergency and restoring full press freedom and other rights as soon as that occurs.

As for trying to make us cry "uncle," this only stiffens our resistance. We know only one cry — the cry for peace with dignity. That is what we seek from the United States. Despite the crimes committed against us, we extend our hand in friendship. □